

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: OCTOBER 22, 2013

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR & MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: COUNCILMAN JUSTIN M. WILSON

SUBJECT: BROADBAND STRATEGY

Next month, we will be considering changes to the composition and responsibilities of our IT Commission. These recommendations are designed to reflect the dramatic evolution that we have seen in the role of Information Technology in the daily lives of our residents, the operations of the businesses in our community and in the provision of municipal services to our neighborhoods.

In October of 1994, at the initiative of Councilwoman Pepper the Council created the “Ad Hoc Task Force on Information and Communication Technologies” to explore emerging “computer-related information and communication technologies.” In October of 1997, the City Council created the Commission on Information Technology, combining the Task Force and Alexandria Cable Television Advisory Commission¹. When the Commission was created, the Internet was in its infancy, the City wielded broad authority over our cable franchise, and fiber was something that was only in healthy breakfast cereals.

Two decades later, the basic infrastructure of our community, roads, bridges, sidewalks, and sewers, now must include lit fiber in conduit under those roads, bridges and sidewalks.

Unfortunately, the vagaries of the free market², poor timing, bad luck, and aging infrastructure have left the City behind neighboring communities and communities around the country.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, a City of 170,000 people retro-fitted³ a public electricity utility to build a \$300 million fiber network—which has provided its residents and businesses with the fastest broadband in our nation. It is now an economic development engine for the City.

¹ <http://dockets.alexandriava.gov/icons/FY98/102597PH/dit26.tif>

² <http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/citizen/info/verizon030910.pdf>

³ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-switch/wp/2013/09/17/how-chattanooga-beat-google-fiber-by-half-a-decade/>

Baltimore, Maryland, another community where Comcast holds the cable franchise and whom Verizon has snubbed for broadband deployment, has taken steps to replicate Chattanooga and build a fiber network to be leased by providers—including Comcast⁴.

In response to Council guidance, the City Manager proposed \$10 million in his supplemental capital investment options to begin construction of a Municipal Fiber Network. Without a true Broadband Strategy, it is no surprise that this did not receive the support of the Council.

The IT Commission will now be poised to partner with City Staff in the development of such a strategy, and I believe Council should help define that work effort.

Specifically, I believe that City Staff, utilizing the expertise of the IT Commission members, should develop and propose a Broadband Strategy that considers the following (among other ideas that may be proposed):

Conduit Deployment: The Strategy should consider a variety of options for expediting the deployment of new conduit that can be utilized or leased for fiber deployment:

“Piggy-backing” onto seemingly unrelated infrastructure work (sewer and water repairs and upgrades) to deploy new conduit—in possible partnership with public and private entities (a “dig-once” policy);

Utilizing private development and redevelopment activity to deploy new conduit;

Modifying existing right-of-way and permitting policies to encourage additional private investment while ensuring the public’s safety (*e.g.*, clarifying and streamlining processes to reduce the costs associated with delay).

Broadband Asset Inventory: We have assets in our City today (light poles, rooftops, buildings, databases) that can be leveraged to expand broadband availability. We need to inventory those assets in order for the City and private entities to utilize them expeditiously.

Public Use: Expanding broadband provides numerous opportunities for our residents and businesses, but it also provides exciting opportunities to more efficiently and effectively deliver City services.

Public/Private Partnerships: Exploring partnership opportunities for the expansion of broadband infrastructure—including the use of outside funding sources.

Cc: Rashad Young, City Manager; Tom Gates, Deputy City Manager

⁴ <http://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2013/08/14/dissed-by-google-baltimore-eyes-new.html?page=all>